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ABSTRACT

New readers must be taught a variety of decoding skills to allow them to increase fluency and get on with the process of meaning making. Four of the most important strategies of decoding are: (1) using context clues; (2) developing a sight vocabulary of whole words; (3) analyzing the parts of words; and (4) attending to the letter-sound (phonics) connection. Practical applications of these strategies enable a learner to become an independent reader. (RS)

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WASHINGTON LITERACY
Tutor Training Handbook

to accompany the
WASHINGTON LITERACY TUTOR TRAINING WORKSHOP

SEGMENT: SPIRAL OF STRATEGIES FOR DECODING

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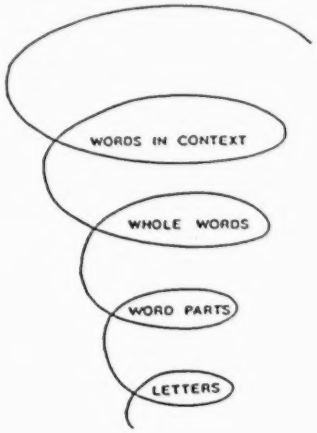
DECODING

Some people think that good readers decode every word in a passage. Instead, fluent readers skip over many words as they read. Skipping them is, in fact, the way that fluent readers most often treat unknown or unfamiliar words. If omitting them doesn't disrupt the meaning of the passage, good readers hardly even see them. At other times, good readers substitute in their mind's eye a familiar word for what appears on the page, or they may make a quick guess at the meaning and pronunciation of the word in the text and keep on reading. All of these strategies allow readers to keep going, focused on the process of making meaning.

There are times, however, when every reader encounters a word that s/he doesn't recognize and that must be decoded if the passage is to make sense. Reading, making meaning, is interrupted until the word is decoded. Because this point is reached often by new readers, it is very important that they be taught a variety of decoding skills. These skills must fit the whole range of reading experiences and be able to be used quickly. Then the new reader can return to the process of making meaning before losing the sense of the passage.

Four of the most important strategies for decoding words are using context clues, developing a sight vocabulary of whole words, analyzing the parts of word, and attending to the letter-sound connection. Although these can be taught as distinct methods of decoding, they are parts of the same process. In reading, the four strategies are often used together, almost simultaneously. New readers need to learn all four so that they can select the ones most useful in a particular situation.

SPIRAL of STRATEGIES



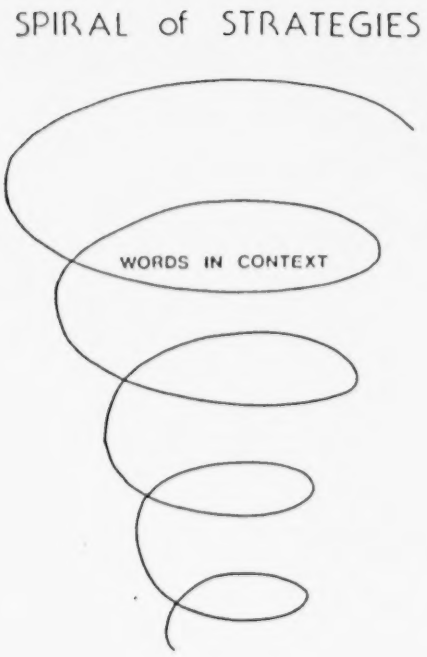
WORDS IN CONTEXT

The reader's familiarity with the language and subject matter, the meaning of the whole passage and the words directly before and after an unknown word give clues that permit decoding. New readers need to learn to trust their own judgement, make reasonable guesses and keep reading.

Calling words for new readers or correcting reasonable substitutions doesn't help. Instead, when the reader is stuck, ask questions that will assist him/her to develop skills in using context clues. Ask,

> "What word to you know that
> makes sense in the slot
> and begins with the letter ___?"

Accept any answer that allows the learner to continue reading with meaning. Teach important words and correct pronunciations during the next lesson.



WHOLE WORDS

All readers depend on a vocabulary of words that are recognized and immediately understood. That group of learned words is usually called a sight word vocabulary. The larger and more varied a reader's sight word vocabulary can become, the more enjoyment and meaning there is in reading.

In order to develop a sight word vocabulary, it is necessary to temporarily isolate a word from context and study it. This can be done before a passage is read or afterwards, when troublesome but important words have been identified.

One way to study whole words is to make sight word cards. This is particularly helpful in learning words that are frequently used, are spelled in a way that makes them difficult to decode, or are of special interest and importance to the reader. Reinforce the meaning of the word by using it in a sentence or sharing a definition. Outline the configuration or shape of the word to make it easier to recall. Allow the learner to keep the sight word card s/he recognizes as an affirmation of ownership. Review learned words often, emphasizing progress.

WORD PARTS

If the reader doesn't recognize a word and the context doesn't give enough clues for a reasonable guess at meaning, it is often helpful to break the word into parts. Teach learners to look for large words called compounds that are a combination of two or more small words. Almost all other multi-syllabic words are combinations of small units of meaning, called prefixes, suffixes and roots. Knowing some of them increases a learner's reading and writing vocabularies.

Point out compound words or words that contain meaningful roots and affixes in a new reader's speech or tutoring materials. Use the following list in decoding words found in material of interest and importance to your reading student.

COMMON ROOTS, PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES AND THEIR MEANINGS

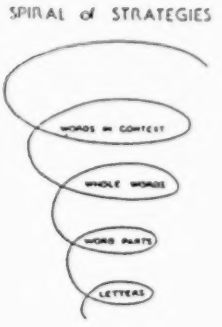
A:	a-,a	not, without
	ab-	away, from
	acro,alti	high
	ambi	both, around
	ambul	to walk
	ana-,an-	back,against
	andr	man
	ann,enn	year
	anthro	man
	anti-	against
	aqua	water
	arch	first, rule
	-arium	place where
	astro	star
	athl	contest
	audio	to hear
	auto-	self
B:	baro-	pressure
	bene	well
	bi-	two
	biblio	book
	bio	life
C:	capt,cept,	seize, hold
	cephal	head
	card	heart
	cent	hundred
	chron	time
	-cide	to kill,cut
	circum-	around
	-cle,-cule	little
	com-,con-	with, together
	contra-	against
	counter-	opposite
	corp	body
	cosmo	universe
	cred	believe
D:	de-	negative
	dec-	ten
	die	God
	demo-	people
	dent,adont	teeth
	derm	skin
	dexter	hand
	dia-, di-	between
	dict	speak
	dis-	negative,away
	duct	to lead
E:	e-,ex-,ec-	out, away
	-ee	one who
	-el	little
	en-,em-	into
	epi-	on,outside
	equi	equal
	-er	one who
	erg	energy
	-ery	place where
	esthe	feeling
	-ette, -et	little
	eu-	good
	extra-	outside

F:	fac, -fy	to make or do
	flu	to flow
	fore-	in front of
	frag, fract	to break
	frater	brother
	fric	to rub
G:	gen	kind, race
	geo	earth
	gon	angle, corner
	grad,gress	to step
	graph, gram	to write
	gyn	woman
H:	helio	sun
	hemi-	half
	hetero	other, different
	homo	man
	hydr	water
	hyper-	over, above
	hypn	sleep
	hypo-	under
I:	il,im,in,ir	not
	-ing	state of being
	inter-	between, among
	intra	within
J:	ject	to throw
K:	-kin	little
	krypt	hidden
L:	-ling	little
	loc	place
	log	word, speech
M:	magn-, mega-	big
	mal-	bad, badly
	manu-	hand
	mar	sea
	mater	mother
	med	middle
	merc	to trade
	meter,metr	to measure
	micro-	small
	min	less,little
	mis-	wrongly
	mit,miss	to send
	mono-	one
	mort	death
N:	naut	to sail
	neo-	new
	noc	night
	nom, nym	name
	novem,non	nine
	nox	injure
O:	oct-	eight
	-ology	study of
	omni-	all
	op	eye
	-or	one who
	-orama	view
P:	pan-, panto-	all
	pater	father
	path-	feel
	patho	disease
	ped, pod	foot
	penta-	five
	phil	love
	-phobia	fear of
	phon	sound
	photo, phos	light
	plumb	metal
	poly-	many
	port	to carry
	pre-, pro-	before
	psyche	mind
	psycho	soul
Q:	quadr-,quart	four
	quin	five
R:	re-	again
	reg-, rect	to rule
	rode, rose	to gnaw
S:	scope	to look
	scrib,script	to write
	sect	to cut
	sen	old
	sent	feel
	sept	seven
	sex	six
	son	sound
	soror	sister
	spec, spic	to look
	sub-	under
	super-, sur-	over
	syn-,sym	together

T:	tach	fast	U:	-ulous	full of
	-tain	to have		un-	not
	tang, tact	to touch		uni-	one
	techni	skill, art			
	tele-	from afar	V:	vert, vers	to turn
	terr	earth		vist	clothing
	theo	God		vic, vis	to see
	therm	heat		volv, volu	to roll
	tor	to twist			
	tract	to draw, drag	X:	xeno	foreign
	trans-	across			
	tri-	three	Z:	zoo	animal

PHONICS

Sometimes words can be decoded by looking at the relationship between letters and sounds. This approach is often called phonics. Phonics is most useful if the word being decoded is already known to the reader and follows a regular phonetic pattern. In order to be a meaningful approach, phonics depends on the reader's use of context to supply more than random guesses at sounds.



Before beginning to teach phonics, it's a good idea to remember several things. First, since fluent readers use phonics at the same time as other strategies, phonics should be taught with them. It is also good to recall that English is not a phonetically regular language. A phonetic approach to decoding words works only a small percentage of the time. Remember, too, that unbroken repetition of any approach becomes boring and ineffective. Intersperse phonics lessons with other learning activities.

There are many approaches to teaching phonics. One of the strategies is to link the letter with a guide word. A guide word is a word that begins with the letter and the sound your student needs to be able to recall. Allowing learners to choose the guide word is one way to make the learning easier and more relevant.

Another way to learn the sounds that letters make is to use worksheets and workbooks. There are many phonics workbooks available. The best not only link the sounds to letters within words, but also put the words into the context of sentences, paragraphs and stories that have meaning.

A very different approach is using word patterns. Word games, writing exercises that depend on rhyme, and children's books by Dr. Seuss depend on word pattern. Reading and writing poetry with very obvious rhymes, such as limericks, are fun ways for adults to use this approach. The LVA handbook Tutor includes an excellent section on using word patterns. Many tutor find it a pleasant way to enforce a variety of phonics patterns.

Glass Analysis is a phonics technique that breaks words into units of sound as the words are being introduced. Because it focuses on the relationship between letters and sounds within an individual word, it avoids the problem of teaching rules that do not work. In order to analyze a word according to this pattern:

- Display the word on a flash card, pronounce it carefully and use it in a sentence.
- Repeat the word as part of a definition, running your finger underneath it as you say it.
- Divide the word into units of sound or syllables. For each unit of sound, say:

  In the word _____, the letter/s _____ make the sound _____.
- Ask the learner to identify the letter/s that make each sound unit, covering other letters with your hand, and say:

  In the word _____, what letter/s make the sound _____?
- Ask the student to pronounce the word three times, write it on a paper or in the air, visualize and spell it with eyes closed, or write it into a sentence.
- Direct the student to a reading passage containing the new word or write a passage together that the student can read.

DECODING SUMMARY

Fluent readers are skilled at decoding quickly using a number of strategies so that they do not lose meaning. New readers need to develop the same range of useful approaches. When new readers encounter unfamiliar words, encourage them to make reasonable guesses that reflect their knowledge and the meaning of the selection. Isolate important words and help the learner to commit them to memory. Focus on small units of meaning and sound. By inviting the learner to use all these strategies, you enable him/her to become an independent reader.